

ZIMBABWE'S MILITARIZED, ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM

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Authoritarianism in Zimbabwe survives because a coalition of political and military elites stands ready and willing to employ violence to execute the Machiavellian vision of President Robert Mugabe and perpetuate his control of the state. Several variables reinforce the durability of this regime—chief among them the mass out-migration and the large inflow of remittances that has decimated the middle class and dampened the political voice of those who remain in the country. Beginning in 2000, Zimbabwe's authoritarianism became militarized with the overt intrusion of the security sector into the political arena, a process that reached its peak before the June 2008 presidential runoff election. The electoral dimension of its authoritarianism stems from the fact that the regime unflinchingly holds elections in search of popular legitimacy but then manipulates them for its own ends. This article dissects Zimbabwe's militarized form of electoral authoritarianism with specific reference to the 2008 reign of terror. It concludes that the factor that best explains the regime is the symbiosis between the party and the security sector, with Mugabe providing the glue that binds them together in pursuit of regime survival.

Many one-party and dominant-party regimes survived the demise of the Soviet era despite the broad sweep of modern political democratization. Among the survivors was Zimbabwe.¹ This article focuses on the case of Zimbabwe with specific reference to the country's elections in 2008 and the factors that played critical roles in the maintenance of the political regime. It argues that the security factor looms larger than other explanations, but also brings into the equation variables that work to cushion the regime but that are not intrinsic to it.

EXPLAINING THE PHENOMENON OF AUTHORITARIAN DURABILITY

Authoritarian durability is not a new political phenomenon, nor is it a dying one. The euphoria generated by the collapse of many seemingly robust one-party and dominant-party regimes overshadowed the preceding interest in studies of authoritarianism to a point where "the end of the twentieth century witnessed a

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